

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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R 280630Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0044

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

CONCUSNAVEUR LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5200

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E.O. 11652; GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR SU TS

SUBJECT: SOVIET NAVAL VISIT TO TUNISIA

REF: TUNIS 3128 (231600Z MAY 75)

1. SUMMARY: TWO SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS VISITED TUNISIA
AUGUST 21 TO 26 IN SIXTH SOVIET NAVY PORT CALL HERE SINCE
FIRST SOVIET NAVAL VISIT IN MAY 1974 AND SECOND SINCE SOVIET
PREMIER KOSYGIN VISITED TUNISIA IN MAY 1975. THE ROUTINE
FOR THIS PORT CALL MORE CLOSELY PARALLELED GOT TREATMENT
FOR HIGH-LEVEL U.S. SIXTH FLEET VISITS TO TUNISIA THAN
PREVIOUS SOVIET VISITS. THIS TREATMENT INDICATES INCREASED
GOT RESPONSIVENESS TO SOVIET DESIRE FOR GREATER NAVAL ACCESS
TO TUNISIA AND WOULD APPEAR TO JUSTIFY SOVIET CONCLUSION THAT
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RELATIONS WITH GOT ARE INDEED LOOKING UP. TUNISIANS,
FOR THEIR PART, NO DOUBT FEEL THAT IN AN ERA OF DETENTE

THEY MUST BE INCREASINGLY RECEPTIVE TO SOVIET REQUESTS FOR NAVAL VISITS. SUCH ACTION ALSO COUNTERS THIRD WORLD CHARGES OF COOPERATING TOO CLOSELY WITH U.S. WHILE THERE IS PROBABLY NO DIRECT CONNECTION, A BACKDROP TO GOT RECEPTIVITY IS TUNISIAN DISAPPOINTMENT WITH SHARP REDUCTION OF U.S. ECONOMIC CREDIT TO TUNISIA AND UNHAPPINESS THAT WE CANNOT BE MORE FORTHCOMING REGARDING NEW MILITARY PACKAGE. END SUMMARY.

2. FROM AUGUST 21 TO 26 TWO SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS PAID AN "OFFICIAL" VISIT TO THE PORT OF LA GOULETTE NEAR TUNIS. THE TWO VESSELS (KYNDA CLASS GUIDED MISSILE CRUISER "ADMIRAL GOLOVKO" AND KOTOV CLASS GUIDED MISSILE FRIGATE "NAKHODCHIVYY") WERE COMMANDED BY REAR ADMIRAL VLADIMIR ILITCH AKIMOV. AKIMOV UNDERTOOK NORMAL ROUND OF OFFICIAL CALLS INCLUDING SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE AHMED BENNOUR AND THE GOVERNOR OF TUNIS. HE ALSO TRAVELLED TO THE MOUNTAIN RESORT OF AIN DRAHAM TO CALL ON VACATIONING PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. IN ADDITION TO OFFICIAL CALLS, THE SHIP VISIT PROGRAM INCLUDED A SHIPBOARD RECEPTION ATTENDED BY THE SOVIET COMMUNITY IN TUNIS, MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, AND TUNISIAN MILITARY AND NAVAL OFFICERS PLUS LAYING OF A WREATH, A SOVIET-TUNISIAN SPORTS EVENT, AND FOLKLORE PRESENTATIONS BY SOVIET SAILORS. TUNISIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE VISIT WAS AMPLE WITH DAILY, OFTEN FRONT-PAGE ARTICLES ON THE ACTIVITIES OF AKOMOV AND FILM REPORTS ON THE TV NEWS.

3. AFTER HIS CALL ON BENNOUR, AKIMOV GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THEY HAD DISCUSSED COOPERATION BETWEEN TUNISIA AND THE SOVIET UNION AND THAT AKIMOV HAD EXPRESSED THE HOPE OF SEEING IT FURTHER REINFORCED. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE VISIT TO TUNISIA OF SOVIET PREMIER KOSYGIN (SEE REFTTEL) ALONG WITH "THE VISIT WHICH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WILL MAKE TO THE USSR" WILL CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT STEP ON THE ROAD TO STRENGTHENING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. FINALLY, HE PAID HOMAGE TO THE "GLORIOUS BATTLE OF THE TUNISIAN PEOPLE TO LIBERATE THEIR COUNTRY" AND SAID THAT THIS NAVAL VISIT WILL CONTRIBUTE
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TO THE CONSOLIDATION OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS.

4. THE VISIT OF THESE TWO VESSELS TO TUNISIA IS THE SECOND SOVIET NAVY PORT CALL SINCE KOSYGIN WAS HERE IN MAY AND THE SIXTH SINCE THE FIRST SOVIET NAVAL VISIT OCCURRED IN MAY 1974 (SEE A-103, JUNE 18, 1974). THE FIRST VISIT AFTER KOSYGIN'S STOP IN TUNIS WAS FROM MAY 28 TO 31 IN LA GOULETTE BY THE UGRA CLASS SUBMARINE TENDER "CANGUT". MEDIA COVERAGE FOR THE MAY VISIT WAS LIGHT BUT THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE CURRENT VISIT IS THE

HEAVIEST EVER FOR THE SOVIETS. WHILE THE VISIT'S PROFILE IN THE PRESS HAS BEEN HIGH, SOVIET SAILORS ON LIBERTY HAVE NOT BEEN AS NOTICEABLE AS IN THE PAST. PREVIOUSLY, THEY AND THEIR OFFICER CHAPERONES HAVE VENTURED INTO DOWNTOWN TUNIS (SOME 10 KILOMETERS FROM THE PORT) BUT THIS TIME HAVE MOSTLY REMAINED IN THE SUBURBS NEAR LA GOULETTE.

5. COMMENT:

A. OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN MONTHS THE SOVIETS HAVE MADE A CONSIDERABLE DENT IN GOT RELUCTANCE TO PLAY HOST TO SOVIET SHIPS. THE MEDIA COVERAGE ACCORDED THIS MOST RECENT VISIT AND AKIMOV'S ACTIVITIES WHILE HERE IS A NEW HIGH IN TUNISIAN PUBLICITY OF SOVIET NAVAL CALLS, AND IS COMPARABLE TO THAT ACCORDED HIGH-LEVEL SIXTH FLEET VISITS. FROM SOVIET STANDPOINT, WARMTH OF THIS GOT RECEPTION PROBABLY REINFORCES IMPRESSION WE GATHER SOVIETS HAVE THAT KOSYGIN VISIT LAST MAY WAS A GREAT SUCCESS AND THAT RELATIONS WITH GOT ARE SWINGING UPWARD SHARPLY. SOVIET USE OF TUNISIAN PORTS IS STILL AT LEVEL WELL BELOW THAT OF SIXTH FLEET, BUT IT MAY HAVE REACHED A FREQUENCY (ALTHOUGH EMBASSY IS NOT IN A POSITION SO TO ESTIMATE) WHICH SOVIETS FIND CONSIDERABLY USEFUL TO THEIR MEDITERRANEAN FLEET.

B. DESPITE THEIR TRADITIONAL FEAR OF THE SOVIET UNION, THE TUNISIANS NO DOUBT FEEL THAT IN AN ERA OF DETENTE THEY MUST BE INCREASINGLY RECEPTIVE TO SOVIET REQUESTS FOR NAVAL VISITS. ALSO, GOT MAY WELL BELIEVE THAT BY ACQUIESCING IN REGULAR, IF NOT FREQUENT, SOVIET FLEET VISITS THEY ARE COUNTERING THIRD-WORLD CHARGES OF COOPERATING TOO CLOSELY WITH THE USA. WHILE THERE IS
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PROBABLY NO DIRECT CONNECTION, A BACKDROP TO FOREGOING RECEPTIVITY IS TUNISIAN DISAPPOINTMENT WITH SHARP REDUCTION OF U.S. ECONOMIC AID TO TUNISIA AND UNHAPPINESS THAT WE CANNOT BE MORE FORTHCOMING REGARDING NEW MILITARY PACKAGE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT GOT HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED BY FACT THAT, SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL. TUNISIAN PUBLIC REACTION TO RECENT SOVIET VISITS HAS BEEN AT LEAST MILDLY FAVORABLE.
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